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SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES¹

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

III. THE HIGH-SCHOOL PERIOD — *Continued*

WHILE these movements were in progress in the domain of higher education, a like movement was affecting the organization of elementary schools. The results in this case were much more decisive and universal than in the case of the higher institutions. The early part of this century was a time when privately managed societies for the education of the poor flourished beyond all previous experience. Both in England and in America the awakening sense of the value of education to all the people found expression for the most part in this form of organization. But very slowly in England, more rapidly in our own country, the direct agency of the state was called in to accomplish the task, which the most devoted private enterprise was not equal to. Before the middle of the century a very general effort was making in this country in provide elementary education for the whole people in state systems of common schools.

It was in the full swing of this movement toward direct public participation in educational enterprise that the high schools came into being. As far back as 1795, Samuel Adams, in his inaugural address as governor of Massachusetts, had said :

It is with satisfaction that I have observed the patriotic exertions of worthy citizens to establish academies in various parts of the Commonwealth. It discovers a zeal highly to be commended. But while it is acknowledged that great advantages have been derived from these institutions, perhaps it may be justly apprehended that multiplying them may have a tendency to injure the ancient and beneficial mode of education in town grammar schools.

The peculiar advantage of such schools is that the poor and the rich may derive equal benefit from them ; but none excepting the more wealthy, generally speaking, can avail themselves of the benefits of the academies. Should these institutions detach the attention and influence of the wealthy from the generous support of the town schools, is it not to be feared that useful learning,

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ing, instruction, and social feelings in the early parts of life may cease to be so equally and universally disseminated as it has heretofore been ?¹

The academies, however, could offer at that time advantages which could hardly be found in a Latin grammar school. When later the towns began to establish schools which offered the broad and "practical" courses of study previously found only in the academies, new point was given to the argument in favor of public schools. The differentiation of public and private educational functions proceeded more slowly in the case of the secondary schools than in that of either the higher or the lower institutions. But the Dartmouth College case fixed definitely upon the academies the character of private institutions. They discharged an important public function; many of them were endowed with lands bestowed upon them by the state; some of them received direct appropriations in money from the state treasury; the most of them were regularly incorporated under state authority. But legally they were private institutions, and there was a growing demand for schools which should be public in every sense. The terms "public" and "private" became words to point an argument, or sometimes, it may be confessed, to take the place of argument. After the movement was once started the high schools steadily advanced and the weaker and less fortunate of the academies steadily declined.

One of the best illustrations of the opposition between the old ideal and system and the new, may be seen in the history of the Free Academy of Norwich, Connecticut. The following sketch of the history of this institution is taken from its catalogue for 1894-5, the statement given in the latest issue of the catalogue being too brief for the present purpose :

The Free Academy originated in a remarkable movement of leading citizens for the improvement of the educational advantages of Norwich. This movement commenced about 1846 and culminated in 1854, when the academy was incorporated. The leader of the enterprise was Dr. John P. Gulliver, who died last year in Andover, Mass., and has left behind him an enduring claim to the gratitude of dwellers in Norwich in all coming generations. The popular movement was part of that general agitation out of which came the

¹Quoted by MARTIN, *The evolution of the Massachusetts public school system*, pp. 128, 129.

high-school system, first developed by Horace Mann in Massachusetts, and afterward generally adopted in the United States.

In Norwich, however, no high school was established. Instead of this, a body of the most influential citizens took upon their own shoulders the burden of providing for higher education. Amid much enthusiasm an endowment of \$50,000 was raised, with \$30,000 additional to cover the cost of the school building, and the academy was opened October 21, 1856, with eighty pupils. The school, thus auspiciously founded, grew with a healthy growth, in both endowment and number of pupils, during the first thirty years of its existence; but the great extension of its influence and its expansion during the last ten years, beyond what even its founders ventured to anticipate, are chiefly due to the wise liberality and personal interest of Mr. William A. Slater, a graduate of the academy in 1875, and of Harvard University in 1881.

A more extended account of the beginnings was given by Dr. Gulliver himself in his address at the dedication of the first Free Academy building, in October, 1856. Dr. Robert P. Keep, the present principal of the school, has kindly loaned me a copy of this address as contained in the *Weekly Courier* of November 25, 1856. I am not aware that it is accessible in any other form; and its bearing upon the present subject is so intimate and the intrinsic interest of some portions of it so great, that I will present in this place somewhat extended passages from it:

In January, 1839, a serious effort was made to effect a thorough reorganization of the city schools. This movement took its rise in the debates of the Norwich Mechanic's Association, in whose meetings the question had been discussed for two years, "Is the school fund of Connecticut, as at present used, an injury or a benefit to our schools?" The conviction became at last quite universal that without additional taxation of property for the support of schools the fund is a decided injury to the cause it was intended to promote. A petition was accordingly prepared, in which similar associations in Hartford and New Haven united; praying the legislature to grant to school districts the power of imposing taxes for the support of schools.

This petition was granted in respect to the districts represented by the petitioners. Thereupon a report was presented by the Rev. Mr. Paddock and Mr. Francis A. Perkins to the school society recommending the union of the three central districts of the city and the establishment in them of a graded system of schools, with a high school at its head. This plan was, after some discussion, adopted without a dissenting voice. Certain individuals were, however, dissatisfied with this result, and in September of the same year they succeeded in procuring a reconsideration of the former vote, and the project was for that time abandoned.

An interesting reference is made to the struggle, carried on in mass meetings and at the polls, between the advocates and the opponents of the high school. The address then continues:

This was the soil into which the seed was cast from which grew the grand enterprise whose successful beginning we celebrate today. In the midst of the struggle a gentleman, since a large donor to the institution, declared, more in jest than in earnest, "These men talk about a high school! I would not take one for a gift if it is to be managed by such assemblages as we have lately had at the Town Hall. I am in favor of an endowed school and would give \$5000 toward one." This chance remark suggested the idea of this institution; and led to a series of inquiries and investigations which were continued for two years. The first question was, Are public high schools, supported by taxation, in all respects successful? the second, Would endowed free schools remedy their defects? the third, On what plan should endowed schools be conducted in order to insure success? On these points, either by correspondence or by personal interviews, a large number of the leading educators of the country were consulted. It was ascertained that in all quarters apprehension was beginning to be felt in regard to the working of our higher public schools. The lower schools up to the grade of the grammar school were well sustained. Men were to be found in all our communities who had been themselves educated up to that point, and understood, practically, the importance of such schools, in sufficient numbers to control popular sentiment, and secure for them ample appropriations and steady support. But the studies of the high school, Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, Ancient History, Latin, Greek, French and German, were a perfect "terra incognita" to the great mass of the people. While the High School was a new thing and while a few enlightened citizens had the control of it, in numerous instances it was carried to a high state of perfection. But after a time the burden of taxation would begin to be felt. Men would discuss the high salaries paid to the accomplished teachers which such schools demand, and would ask, "To what purpose is this waste?" Demagogues, keen-scented as wolves, would snuff the prey. "What do we want of a High School to teach rich men's children?" they would shout. "It is a shame to tax the poor man to pay a man \$1800 to teach children to make x's and pothooks and gabble parler-vous." The work would go bravely on; and on election day, amid great excitement, a new school committee would be chosen, in favor of retrenchment and popular rights. In a single day the fruit of years of labor would be destroyed. Such occurrences, it was ascertained, had already become sufficiently numerous to excite alarm among the most intelligent friends of education. Even in communities where the high school had been uniformly prosperous, it appeared that the same influence was at work and awakened constant apprehension. The proposal to establish an endowed high school was regarded with great favor, and a uniform opinion was

expressed that, properly managed, it would supply all the defects in the public high school. Indeed the plan, though generally regarded as impracticable, was hailed with enthusiasm, as at least a theoretical solution of a very perplexing problem. The next point was to ascertain the principles which should form the basis of such an enterprise. The Putnam School, at Newburyport, seemed to furnish the best model for imitation. This school had received an endowment of \$50,000, from Oliver Putnam, Esq., of Newbury, and was then in successful operation, extending a most beneficent influence over a wide circle of common schools in eastern Massachusetts. One unfortunate error had, however, been committed by its founders, in assigning the election of the trustees to the town. A noted political leader, taking advantage of this circumstance, persuaded the people that Mr. Putnam's design in founding the school, was not so much to raise the standard of education, as to relieve the burden of taxation, and proposed that the school should be made a substitute for one of the public schools of the town. There is great danger that the benevolent design of Mr. Putnam will be frustrated by the same influence which is sapping the foundation of many of our public high schools. Another salutary caution was given by the experience of the endowed school at Colchester. The funds there are under the control of a self-perpetuating board of trustees. But the school embraces all departments of instruction from the infant school upward. Then it becomes a rival to the common schools, and depresses rather than elevates them. Various other points in the plan became the subject of careful thought and inquiry. The effort was made to attain all the light which the experience and skill of practical educators could furnish, though the painful conviction still remained, that others would, in like manner, hereafter learn wisdom from the errors into which we might fall.

The opposing view was forcibly presented about this time by the Hon. George S. Boutwell, secretary of the Board of Education of the State of Massachusetts, in an address before the American Institute of Instruction. The address is interesting not only because it presents a favorable view of the high school movement, but also because it makes special reference to the Norwich Free Academy. The following passages are especially significant :

The distinguishing difference between the advocates of endowed schools and of free schools is this : those who advocate the system of endowed academies go back in their arguments to one foundation, which is, that in education of the higher grades the great mass of the people are not to be trusted. And those who advocate a system of free education in high schools put the matter where we have put the rights of property and liberty, where we put the institutions of law and religion — upon the public judgment. And we will stand

there. If the public will not maintain institutions of learning, then, I say, let institutions of learning go down.

It is said that the means of education are better in an endowed academy, or in an endowed free school, than they can be in a public school. What is meant by *means* of education? I understand that, first and chiefly, as extraneous means of education, we must look to a correct public sentiment, which shall animate and influence the teacher, which shall give direction to the school, which shall furnish the necessary public funds. An endowed free academy can have none of these things permanently. Take, for example, the free school established at Norwich by the liberality of thirty or forty gentlemen, who contributed ninety thousand dollars. What security is there that fifty years hence, when the educational wants of the people shall be changed, when the population of Norwich shall be double or treble what it is now, when science shall make greater demands, when these forty contributors shall have passed away, this institution will answer the wants of that generation? According to what we know of the history of this country, it will be entirely inadequate; and, though none of us may live to see the prediction fulfilled or falsified, I do not hesitate to say that the school will ultimately prove a failure, because it is founded in a mistake.¹

Mr. Boutwell discussed the same question in an address delivered at the dedication of the Powers Institute at Bernards-ton. His reference to Dartmouth College on that occasion is significant of the effect which the supreme court decision had had upon popular opinion with reference to secondary schools. He said:

This institution is a high school, and the question is now agitated, especially in the State of Connecticut, "How can the advantages of a high-school education be best secured?" This question I propose to consider. And, first, the high school must be a public school. A *public school* I understand to be a school established by the public—supported chiefly or entirely by the public, controlled by the public, and accessible to the public upon terms of equality, without special charge for tuition.

Private schools may be established and controlled by an individual, or by an association of individuals, who have no corporate rights under the government, but receive pupils upon terms agreed upon, subject to the ordinary laws of the land.

Private schools may be founded also by one or more persons, and by them endowed with funds for their partial or entire support. In such cases the founder, through the money given, has the right to prescribe the rules by which the school shall be controlled, and also to provide for the appointment of its managers or trustees through all time. In such cases, corporate powers

¹ BOUTWELL, *Educational topics and institutions*, pp. 152-154.

are usually granted by the government for the management of the business. But the chief rights of such an institution are derived from the founder, and the facilities for their easy exercise and quiet enjoyment are derived from the state.

Such schools are sometimes, upon a superficial view, supposed to be public, because they receive pupils upon terms of equality, and no rule of exclusion exists which does not apply to all. And especially has it been assumed that a free school thus founded, as the Norwich Free Academy, which makes no charges for tuition, and is open to all the inhabitants of the city, is therefore a public school. These institutions are public in their use, but not in their foundation or control, and are therefore not public schools. The character of a school, as of an eleemosynary institution, is derived from the will of the founder; and when the beneficial founder is an individual, or a number of individuals less than the whole political organization of which the individuals are a part, the institution is private, whatever the rules for its enjoyment may be. To say that a school is a public school because it receives pupils free of charge for tuition, or because it receives them upon conditions that are applied alike to all, is to deny that there are any private schools, for all come within the definition thus laid down.

Nor is there any good reasoning in the statement that a school is public because it receives pupils from a large extent of country. Dartmouth College is a private school, though its pupils come from all the land or all the world; while the Boston Latin School is a public school, though it receives those pupils only whose homes are within the limits of the city. The first is a private school because it was founded by President Wheelock, and has been controlled by him and his successors, holding and governing and enjoying through him, from the first until now; while the Boston Latin School is a public school, because it was established by the city of Boston, through the votes of its inhabitants, under the laws of the state, and is at all times subject, in its government and existence, to the popular will which created it. When we speak of the public we do not necessarily mean the world, nor the nation, nor even the state, but the word *public*, in a legal sense, may stand for any legal political organization, territorially defined, and intrusted in any degree with the administration of its own affairs. . . . Nor is the public character of a school changed by the fact that private citizens may have contributed to its maintenance, if such contributors do not assume to stand in the relation of founders. It is well understood that the beneficial founder of a school is he who makes the first gift or bequest to it, and the legal founder is the government which grants a charter or in any way confers upon it a corporate existence. If a town establish a high school, as in Bernardston today, and accept a gift or bequest, the character of the school is not changed thereby. Mr. Powers did not attempt to establish a new school. He gave the income of ten thousand dollars for the aid of schools then existing, and for the aid of a school whose existence was already contemplated by the laws of the state.

No change has been wrought in your institutions ; they are still public,—your generous testator has only contributed to their support. And, in considering yet further the question, “How can the advantages of a high-school education be best secured?” I shall proceed to compare, with what brevity I can command, the public high school with the free high school or academy upon a private foundation. My reasoning is general, and the argument does not apply to all the circumstances of society. It is not everywhere possible to establish a public high school. In some cases the population may not be sufficient, in others there may not be adequate wealth, and in others there may not be an elevated public sentiment equal to the emergency. In such circumstances, those who desire education must obtain it in the best manner possible ; and academies, whether free or not, and private schools, whether endowed or not, should be thankfully accepted and encouraged. Nor will high schools meet all the wants of society. There must always be a place for classical schools, scientific schools, professional schools, which, in their respective courses of study, either anticipate or follow, in the career of the student, his four years of college life. With these conditions and limitations stated, the point I seek to establish is that a public high school can do the work usually done in such institutions more faithfully, thoroughly, and economically than it can be done elsewhere.

1. The supervision of the public school is more responsible, and consequently more perfect. In private schools, academies, and free high schools which are endowed, there is a board of trustees, who perpetuate, as a corporation, their own existence. Each member is elected for life, and he is not only not responsible to the public, but he is not even responsible, except in extraordinary cases, to his associates. Responsibility is, in all governments, the security taken for fidelity. The election of representatives in the state or national legislature, for life, would be esteemed a great and dangerous innovation.

2. The faithfulness of the teacher is very much dependent upon the supervision to which he is subject. This is only saying that the teacher is human. In the public school there is no motive which can influence a reasonable man that would lead him to swerve in the least from his fidelity to the interest of the school as a whole. No partiality to a particular individual, no desire to promulgate a special idea, can ever stand in the place of that public support which is best secured by a just performance of his duties. In the private school, with a self-perpetuating board of trustees, the temptation is strong to make the organization subservient to some opinion in politics, religion, or social life. This may not always be done ; but in many cases it has been done, and there is no reason to expect different things in the future. I concur, then, unreservedly in the judgment which has placed this institution, in all its interests and in all its duties, under the control of the inhabitants of Bernardston.¹

¹*Op. cit.*, pp. 187-195.

There is no occasion to criticise these opposing views in this place. It may be remarked, however, that the Norwich Free Academy has had and continues to have a highly successful career. At the same time it cannot be said to have inaugurated any general movement toward the establishment of privately managed secondary schools as the direct continuation of city systems of elementary instruction. There is evidently room in our systems of public education for more than one type of secondary-school organization: but the dominant tendency of the past half-century is undoubtedly seen in the upward extension of public elementary schools into public high schools.

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(To be continued)